

THE MINISTER'S SPOUSE

AS PERSON

A Professional Project

Presented to
the Faculty of the School of Theology
at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

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...a person is a fluid process, not a fixed static entity; a flowing river of change, not a block of solid material; a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits.¹

¹ Carl R. Rogers, "What It Means To Become A Person," in Clark E. Moustakas (Ed.), The Self, Explorations in Personal Growth (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 211.

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with an analysis of the minister's spouse (wife) from the perspective of traditional expectations laid upon her from the past and her subsequent struggle to find meaning, self-esteem, worth and value in the present as a person in her own right.

The study is divided into three major portions. The first portion deals with a sociological analysis of the minister's spouse. She is viewed as over against traditional role expectations and seen as no longer identifying or living out those expectations. She has been effected today by contemporary influences, specifically the Women's Liberation Movement. A questionnaire was sent out to minister's spouses to substantiate this assumption and the results were found to corroborate it.

The questionnaire was sent to 48 minister's spouses, mostly in the Southern California area, some in the Midwest, a few in the East and one in the South. Twenty-four of the spouses returned the questionnaire answering the questions in full.

The questionnaire asked such questions as the effect and influence of the Women's Movement on minister's spouses, how they viewed their own personal identities, their happiness level, the mutual support existing in their marriage relationships, parenting, their work outside the home, their involvement in the community, fulfilling and non-fulfilling aspects of the ministry, and expectations they felt laid upon them by the church.

A brief summary concluded that minister's spouses have been

dramatically influenced in recent years by the Women's Liberation Movement. They are functioning differently than in the past. Their consciousness has been raised, they are much freer, and they are living out new identities as persons.

The second portion of this study deals with a theological basis for this new identity of the minister's spouse. Androgyne is set forth as a clue to this new identity. Imago Dei and God's masculine and feminine expressions in Biblical revelation form a basis for women to affirm their equality with men as precious equals as well as affirming their uniqueness as feminine. But an identity beyond feminism is proposed as well: person. St. Paul's Christology is suggested as supportive of this new identity. In Christ the minister's spouse transcends all demeaning stereotypes and is a partner in the joy of life.

The third portion of this study attempts to interpret psychologically the minister's spouse as person in the categories of worth and value. She is to be esteemed because she is worthful and valued. The process by which her worth and value is discovered and known is through dialogue. And finally, self-actualization is proposed as the goal toward which the minister's spouse is to move to secure and enhance her new identity as person.

This study is basically an affirmation of women's worth, value and contribution to all of life in general, and the minister's spouse as person in particular.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. Focusing the Concern

The concern of this paper grows out of a personal and first-hand awareness of my wife's struggle with the image, expectations, role and ensuing pressures of being a minister's spouse. The rewards as well as the handicaps of the ministry require constant evaluation as people themselves are constantly changing. My wife has changed, and is continuing to change. She is emerging as a growing, lively, talented, self-assured person. My recognition and response to that fact must not only be affirming, but facilitating as well. For a woman has an identity apart from what her husband is or does for a living. She is a person in her own right whose identity is to be valued, respected and encouraged.

My contacts with other minister's spouses has confirmed that my wife's struggle is not unique. The literature in the area of minister's spouses in recent years has further confirmed the need for evaluating and updating our knowledge and understanding of the minister's spouse. She¹ is living in a time of monumental change. Old expectations of her identity and function are no longer enabling her needs. She is emerging as a person, a person with value, esteem and potential.

¹I use "she" because all of my research focus is centered on female spouses. It should be noted that more and more minister's spouses are male, however.

Ruth Truman, a Methodist minister's spouse, wrote a book sharing her own struggles with her identity. She said she had become disillusioned with the role of minister's spouse; the demands laid upon her, the lack of privacy for her family, personal needs for friendship that went unfulfilled. She began to withdraw, becoming lonely and frustrated.

One day she had to go into the hospital for surgery. It was through this experience that she began to reevaluate who she was and what she was all about. The following describes the outcome of her conclusions:

Emptiness and bitterness had become my companions. There was no sense of self left. I had lived my life at the whim of children and church, and the real me was about dead---but I got a second chance. I learned a lot about me, about other people, about life and death, joy and sorrow. And I discovered that my friends who were minister's wives were also in trouble because no one had prepared them to live as full persons regardless of their husband's job.²

Ruth Truman's experience is not an isolated case. Many persons go through an identity crisis, a time when they reevaluate their lives, relationships, meaning, self-image and purpose. Who am I?, they ask. The answer is crucial.

Another minister's spouse expressed her concern when she began to look at herself. She found herself lacking freedom to express her individuality and her essential personhood, and responded in the following manner:

We, (minister's spouses) are not mass produced, packaged and peddled, from the ancient formula of 50 percent tidiness, 50 percent timidity and 100 percent cover up. Each of us, to use Paul Tillich's words, is a 'unique,' 'unrepeatable,' 'irreplaceable,' 'unexchangeable' self. To limit our identity to our historical

²Ruth Truman, Underground Manual for Minister's Wives (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), pp. 7-8.

position stunts our growth as persons created in the image of God. And yet, to pretend the image does not exist is to cloud the reality of our situation. Who am I?³

That is the question: who is the minister's spouse today. It is the purpose of this paper to examine that question and attempt some answers.

B. Advancing the Thesis

The thesis of this paper is that a minister's spouse is, in fact, more than the sum of her traditionally defined parts. Ultimately and most fundamentally, she is a person who has been created in the image of God, and who is related to her male counterpart in a partnership of love. Her essential identity is revealed in the express image of God whose likeness she bears. Along with her male counterpart, she is to be valued and esteemed.

This paper will attempt to point out what is already happening among many minister's spouses today; namely, the emergence of a new and dynamic identity that is lending worth and direction to their lives. This paper will attempt to explore and interpret this new identity, and give theological and psychological support for it as well. The assumption of this paper is that the woman who knows herself as a valued person will come to function with greater confidence, energy, intentionally and fulfillment in her associations and relationships.

The selection of the word "spouse" was intentional. Many minister's spouses whom I interviewed communicated discomfort with the title "minister's wife." Implicit in this designation, they said, are

³Marilyn Brown Oden, The Minister's Wife: Person or Position? (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 16.

traditional assumptions that fail to communicate something of their own identities as persons. The word "spouse" is not without its difficulties, either. But it is a softer designation. Furthermore, it was the original intention of this paper to deal with husbands of ministers as well. Unfortunately, I was unable to collect enough data to adequately cover such findings. In the years ahead, hopefully such data will emerge as more women become ministers. These were the reasons for selecting the term "spouse."

It is to be noted that the subject matter itself is broad in scope and dimension. Any one of the sub-headings indicated in this paper has the potential of a thesis by itself. It has not been my intention to present an exhaustive study on this subject. I will leave that for someone else to do. Rather, I have attempted to present a thoughtful, creative summary approach to this subject, an approach which I am hopeful will stimulate further curiosity, inquiry and investigation. If there is anything different about my approach, it is my effort to bring together the minister's spouse's identity with an understanding of androgyne. My intent will be to link these together as an affirming statement of women's equal and indispensable worth.⁴

C. Methodological Approach

The methodological approach for this paper is predicated on three major points. The first is a sociological analysis of the

⁴Androgyne is a relatively new area of study. Not much has been written on it. However, Sandra Bem presented a paper on the subject several years back at a Symposium on Women at U.C.L.A., May, 1973. Work has been done in this area in Mircea Eliade, The Two and the One (London: Harvill Press, 1962).

minister's spouse. This section will attempt to deal with traditional expectations, changing attitudes, the influence of the Women's Liberation Movement and an emerging consciousness. The results of a questionnaire I sent out to minister's spouses will be listed here as well. The questions ask for attitudes and behavior of present-day minister's spouses. The second section deals with a theological understanding of identity from the perspective of androgyne, and the third section attempts to give a psychological interpretation to identity that hopefully will enable the minister's spouse to function more effectively in today's world.

The questionnaire was designed to illicit answers from minister's spouses from selected parts of the country. Twenty-five questions were asked in all and a copy of them appears in the appendix at the end of this paper. There were 48 questionnaires sent out and 24 received back. They were sent to friends and acquaintances. All of them were spouses of Presbyterian ministers. Most of them reside in Southern California, others in the Midwest and a few from the East and one from the South. Fourteen responses came back from the Southern California area; seven from the Midwest; two from the East; and one from the South.

The nature of the questions was such as to allow for freedom, honesty and expanded comment. Many of the respondents wrote extensive answers and rendered valuable information to my findings. I was interested in receiving feelings and approaches to self-awareness and understanding. Many of the respondents shared these. It is of interest to note that those living in smaller rural settings tended to report more extended comment. That may say something about the more hurried lifestyle in urban areas.

In sending out the questionnaire, I was intentional in attempting to cover the age spectrum. The results were relatively and evenly spread with the largest number of responses coming from the forty to forty-nine age bracket. Unfortunately, I received no responses back from the twenty to twenty-nine age bracket. The age spectrum was as follows: 30-39 years of age, five responses; 40-49 years of age, ten responses; 50-59 years of age, four responses; and 60-69 years of age, five responses. Two persons in the 60-69 age bracket were retired.

I felt good about my sampling. Twenty-four returned questionnaires cannot possibly speak for the entire body of minister's spouses across the country. But there was enough variance to satisfy me that I had received a good sampling.

I indicated I would be happy to share my findings with those who filled out the questionnaire and stated they wished me to send them what I had discovered. About three-quarters indicated they wished to know my findings.

Some of the answers from the questionnaires appear in this paper without comment. Others I try to interact with sociological and psychological insight. I am grateful to those minister's spouses who shared a little of their lives with me through this questionnaire. It is hoped that this modest study will help to share some more light on a very important subject, the minister's spouse as person.

Chapter II

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MINISTER'S SPOUSE

A. Traditional Roles

1. Expectations of the Past. Wallace Denton has indicated that the role of the minister's spouse is unique. When she married her husband, she married more than a man. She married into a long tradition --the ministry.¹ With the accumulation of time and tradition, the ministry has come to assume certain expectations and roles of those who serve in it. Not only have minister-husbands had expectations laid upon them but minister's spouses as well. Ideas and opinions as to what the minister's spouse should do and be, and not do and be, have served to define and characterize her role.

A major expectation from the past has said the minister's spouse should be deeply involved in the life and activity of the church. Tradition has expected her to be ready and willing to serve wherever and whenever asked, either by her husband or the church. She should be prepared to teach Sunday School, sing in the Choir, support the Women's Association, assist her husband in his work...greeting members after the worship service, visiting, helping out at the office..., but never taking on a leadership role in the church.² In short, this traditional view of

¹Wallace Denton, The Role of the Minister's Wife (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 43.

²Ibid., pp. 38-44.

the minister's spouse renders her an assistant to her husband, as a co-servant whose personal feelings and identity are to be sublimated or lived through her husband.

Lorraine Peyton began her life as a traditional minister's spouse thirty years ago in a Presbyterian church in the South. She reported:

The minister's wife was expected to do everything, ranging from entertaining to teaching classes to women's groups to visitations. Just whatever needed to be done. I had no choice. I filled the role for 15 years and it wasn't easy, I was always in the public eye, so I always had to be circumspect.³

Tradition has also expected the minister's spouse to be congenial and a good hostess. She has been expected to be in attendance at teas and stand in line at receptions. She is to "always be an agreeable person,"⁴ happy, smiling and ready at a moment's notice to entertain. "Sometimes she is one of those on duty at the church parlor,"⁵ and then again may be asked and must be prepared to welcome guests at the parsonage, which Hewitt refers to as the "parish parade ground."⁶ In addition, she is to be an excellent housekeeper and always "keep the parsonage clean."⁷

Another expectation from the past states the minister's spouse should dress appropriately but conservatively.⁸ She should exercise good

³Sue Avery, "Clergymen's Wives Break Traditional Mold," Los Angeles Times (February 6, 1977), p.4.

⁴Lora Lee Parrott, How to Be a Preacher's Wife, and Like It (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), p. 64.

⁵Arthur Wentworth Hewitt, The Shepherdess (Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1943), p. 93.

⁶Ibid. ⁷Parrott, p. 63. ⁸Denton, p. 39.

taste in style and dress according to the station of her position. She should not wear anything that would be beneath her dignity, but neither should she try to out-do her sisters in the parish: "...clothes do not make the woman any more than they make the man;" but "woe to her who lays much store by them."⁹ Her husband's salary is frequently insurance that she will dress conservatively.

The minister's spouse has been expected in the past to have well-mannered children.¹⁰ She is an example to the church and the community. If her children are ill-mannered or misbehaved, her credibility will be questioned. A minister's spouse should teach her children, therefore, to be courteous, respectful and well disciplined.

Other expectations of the past have rendered the minister's spouse as one expected to live a seminomadic life style, experience economic hardship and exist contentedly with loneliness.¹¹ But on the other hand she must continue to provide all the services and support for her husband and family, and continue to be a veritable fortress of Christian patience, strength and understanding. She must be careful never to yield to self-pity even if her over-worked husband seems to neglect her feelings or fails to sympathize with her plight at home, frustrated as she might be with domestic duties and the demands of parenting. She must learn that first and foremost her husband does not belong to her but "to the congregation."¹²

⁹Golda Elam Bader, I Married A Minister (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1942), p. 110.

¹⁰Denton, p. 39. ¹¹Denton, p. 40.

¹²Bader, p. 110.

2. Changing Attitudes. Recent years have seen a departure from these traditional expectations of the minister's spouse. While churches in smaller, rural communities may still tend to hang on to some of these expectations,¹³ most churches today by-in-large no longer expect the minister's spouse to carry out prescribed duties or fit an anticipated mold. Times and attitudes have changed.

There are less demands being placed upon minister's spouses by churches today. There is more freedom and less role-playing. In some instances, churches are proud when the minister's spouse goes in the face of tradition, when she relates and participates in the church at her own relaxed level. One parishoner commented:

The congregation considers it a dividend when the minister's wife does anything. We don't even mind if she comes to a church meeting in a tennis dress. We appreciate anything she does, but we don't expect it of her.¹⁴

The attitude of the minister's spouse has changed as well. She no longer feels the compulsion to meet former expectations placed upon her from the past. She is learning to please herself more than other people. She is more frequently saying "no" to what she does not wish to do. She is learning to find her own identity instead of finding it through her husband or others.¹⁵

In short, the minister's spouse is finding traditional expectations an inadequate vehicle to express her essential need for fulfillment and meaning, and she has turned to contemporary influences for direction. She is finding a new identity and purpose in her life, and the Women's Liberation Movement has played a part in her discovery.¹⁶

¹³ Denton, pp. 149-150.

¹⁴ Avery, p. 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

B. The Challenge and Influence of the Women's Liberation Movement

1. Challenging the Stereotypic. The Women's Liberation Movement in this country has challenged many of the old assumptions and stereotypes placed on women; their nature, place and behavior. Many of the stereotypes from the past have assigned characteristics to women that have been less than complimentary or accurate. Such stereotypes have identified women as naturally greedy, gentle, compliant, quiet, submissive, weak, cunning, passive, frivolous, flighty and stupid.¹⁷ These stereotypes have evolved from myth, legends, stories and the historical antagonisms that have existed between the sexes.¹⁸ The Women's Movement has branded such stereotypes as not only inaccurate but demeaning, the result of a masculine-dominated and oriented society.

The Women's Movement has reminded us of the historical precedents behind the stereotyping of women. Patriarchal societies and culture in the past have rendered women as subordinate and submissive to men. Woman's position in the past has been one of legal and emotional deprivation. She was considered "quasi-property and a permanent dependent," never allowed to truly grow up to become a free and autonomous person.¹⁹

¹⁷The ancient Greeks held women as inferior. Aristotle taught that women were "weaker and colder by nature" than men and naturally deficient. Chaucer, Shakespeare and Cervantes reinforced the concept of women's inferiority showing them as tough, lustful and shrewd. In Milton, the woman is typified as a serpent. Lisa Hobbs, Love and Liberation (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), pp. 29-40.

¹⁸For further historical and religious characterizations of women's nature, Julian O'Faolain and Lauro Martines (Eds.) Not in God's Image (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); and the excellent book, Rosemary Ruether, Religion and Sexism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

¹⁹Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Ruether, From Machismo To Mutuality (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 9.

Meanwhile, men found gratification and ego-enhancement in keeping women in their place, confined to domestic roles of child-bearing and home-keeping.

Ruether sees the historical use of male physical force and violence as a further ploy to keep women subservient and in their place.²⁰ The subjugation of women through fear of male brutality has its corollary, Ruether claims, in the emphasis men have placed on sports and war as an outlet for the aggressive use of their bodies. By contrast, the parallel assumption has been made that women are to be meak, underdeveloped and unself-confident in their abilities and feelings to defend themselves.²¹ Male physical prowess has served to insure the stereotype of women's docility.

Religious traditions and practices have fostered male dominance and female submission responses. Rabbinical Judaism held women to be inferior as a result of the Fall, and as a consequence they were often treated as despised.²² Restrictive religious practices confined women to domestic roles. They were expected to bear children and perpetuate the clan name. Oft times women were excluded from religious exercises. The Temple itself provided strictures beyond which a woman was not allowed to go, and separation of men and women in synagogues was not uncommon, especially among Hellenistic Jews.²³

Erik Erikson claims the Reformation masculinized Western society

²⁰Ibid., p. 107. ²¹Ibid.

²²Helmut Thielicke, The Ethics of Sex (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 8-9.

²³I. Sonne, "Synagogue" in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 487.

even further. He states Martin Luther provided new elements for the creation of new roles and identity for men, but created only one new feminine role and identity for women, "the parson's wife."²⁴ This new feminine role of the minister's spouse was determined in large part by Katherine of Bora herself, Erikson continues, a determined woman who created this new identity with the same "determined unself-consciousness with which she made the great Doktor marry her."²⁵ The Reformation, Erikson concludes, created only ideals for women who wanted to be like ministers if they could not in fact be like minister's spouses.²⁶

There are those in the Women's Movement today who feel the church has perpetuated stereotypes of women, conceding to masculinization influences in society. Instead of expressing the feminine values manifested in symbols of Biblical hope, the church has adopted a classical view of man upon which to model its values, internalizing those values in its own institutional structures and rationale for being. As a consequence, the church has come out being anti-feminine in deference to patriarchal assumptions of leadership and structure.²⁷

A common societal stereotype laid upon many women, and which the Women's Movement has challenged, is the traditional expectation that a woman's place is to be in the home, that her only calling in life is to have children and to make the home a "warm nest for her children and a

²⁴ Erik Erikson, Young Man Luther (New York: Norton, 1958), p. 71.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Sarah Bendley Doely (Ed.) Women's Liberation and the Church (New York: Association Press, 1970), p. 36.

refuge from the worldly battles for her husband,"²⁸ that her sole purpose is to serve²⁹ and live her life to advance her husband's career.

Historically, World War I and II saw women leaving the home to enter the work force. She was needed to enable the nation to accomplish its tasks of industrial production. The result of this phenomenon was twofold: not only did it get her out of the home, but it furthermore affirmed her potential as a wage-earner. It moved her in a new direction, affirming her worth and purpose beyond that of raising a family and maintaining the home.³⁰ She has received support and encouragement in her journey in this direction from many along the way. In 1962, Eleanor Roosevelt spoke to a gathering, saying:

Because I anticipate success in achieving full employment and full use of America's magnificent potential, I feel confident that in the years ahead many of the remaining outmoded barriers to women's aspirations will disappear.³¹

Many of those outmoded barriers have been removed, and continue to be removed as women find new meaning and identity beyond the stereotype of a former generation.

²⁸Charolette Clinebell, Meet Me In the Middle (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 1.

²⁹Bianchi states: "Most...women are programed from youth to feel unworthy as women unless they are sacrificing themselves for others... They are taught that taking care of their own desires and needs constitutes selfishness...Women learn from their feminine models that suffering and self-renunciation are the prerequisites for social acceptance as a good wife and mother. Bianchi and Ruether, pp. 56-57.

³⁰Marilyn Brown Oden, Beyond Feminism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 53.

³¹American Woman, Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women (Washington: 1963), p. 64.

2. A New Consciousness. The effect and influence of the Women's Liberation Movement on many women today has been profound. Ruether has called the effect for some women as a "terrifying explosion of consciousness," an experience "self- and world-transcending," tantamount to conversion.³² Stereotypic generalizations are no longer going unchallenged. Women are coming into a new consciousness of affirming self-worth and purpose.

Marilyn Oden is one of the many voices of the new feminine consciousness. She states that women are no longer satisfied with the "mistress-madonna" image and role.³³ Today's woman wants more:

She wants to be someone's wife and somebody's mother, but she wants also to be who she is: a person in her own right. She wants the freedom to actualize her perceived potential rather than live vicariously through her husband and children. She feels her responsibility to society includes, but also reaches beyond, caring for her immediate family.³⁴

The Women's Movement has had a considerable influence upon women in our country. My assumption in this project has been that the minister's spouse has been significantly influenced as well. In order to find this out, I sent a questionnaire to minister's spouses, asking them a series of questions about attitudes and changes they have experienced in their lives and relationships. The results of the questionnaire follow. It will be noted that I have attempted to tabulate the results with numerical breakdowns and designations adding brief sociological and psychocological comments where possible.

C. The Results of the Questionnaire

³² Bianchi and Ruether, p. 108.

³³ Oden, p. 33.

³⁴ Ibid.

1. Response to the Women's Liberation Movement Question. The question was asked, what effect and influence has the Women's Liberation Movement in this country had upon the minister's spouse in regard to how they presently regard their worth and function.

Of the twenty-four respondents, seven answered that the Women's Movement had had little or no effect on them or their identity as persons. Five of the seven respondents were in their fifties or over, and only two offered any critical comment. One person saw the Women's Movement as promoting competition with her husband. "I think God created man and woman to lean against each other," she said, "not for them to try to see which one can stand taller by his or herself." The other person commented, "this movement too will soon pass away."

Two other respondents offered comment on not needing the Women's Movement since they already felt possessed of an adequate self-image. "I have a healthy opinion of myself, worth, skills, talents, abilities, needs, etc.," said the one. The other indicated she had been raised in a home where women were taught never to doubt their abilities, that they could become anything they chose to be or do. Education, this person concluded, was prized and highly esteemed in her home.

Several of the respondents answered the question saying that they didn't need the Women's Movement since they had been affirmed in their identity and lives by a religious experience with Jesus Christ. They indicated feeling fulfilled and having no basic needs as such.

Apart from the speculation that some of the above women may be avoiding their needs for deeper growth, let us affirm on the other hand that there are those who grow up with healthy self-images, whose identity formation has been intentional and wholesome and whose parents may have

been the "trustworthy representatives" of whom Erikson speaks about as teaching their children a valued "hierarchy of roles."³⁵ But not all women have such an experience. The greater number of respondents indicated not only a need but an appreciation for what the Women's Movement has done in their lives.

Sixteen of the twenty-four respondents said they had received positive help, encouragement and guidance from the Women's Movement. While not all of them were willing to totally champion the cause, and a few made disclaimers from the more militant Liberationists, most expressed very thoughtful and grateful insights of appreciation. Here are a few of their responses:³⁶

Women's lib has changed my life significantly, convincing me that God expects me to develop and use my talents as a completely responsible adult.

It has heightened my feeling that all of us, everywhere, need to be aware of the 'prisons' that many, many people experience...

It has influenced me in regard to how I presently regard my worth. Because I do now feel that I have worth, I suppose it has made me function differently as a minister's spouse...

I've grown in my desire to be a person in my own right---not just an extension of my husband. I feel my own directions add to our marriage and free my husband from feeling responsible for my happiness.

I guess I went through the mid-life crisis of looking at what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and I needed more of my own identity separate from my husband's profession.

A husband and wife should be free to become separate and special persons, and if they are allowed to be so---they would have stronger love for one another!

³⁵Erik Erikson, Identity: Youth and Crisis (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 159.

³⁶The questionnaire appears in the appendix of this paper. These quotes contain the findings from that questionnaire.

From these responses it is evident the Women's Movement has played a positive and constructive role in helping minister's spouses find identity and meaning in their lives and relationships. Expressions of self-worth and value are heard from these statements. There is an individuating³⁷ thrust sensed in these comments which indicates many of these women have gotten in touch with their potential. They are discovering a new sense of self-respect and esteem. They are becoming what Maslow called, "self-actualized" persons.³⁸ The Women's Movement has encouraged and given direction to the minister's spouse.

One respondent answered this question stating her strong support for the Women's Movement, but seriously wondering if a 50-50 marriage relationship would ever be workable for her as a minister's spouse. Her concern centered around the reality of her husband's busy schedule which precluded so many domestic responsibilities and personal needs.

An egalitarian marriage relationship, I believe, is an ideal. Stapleton has defined it as:

...having the same status in the relationship, the same responsibility for success for the relationship, and the same responsibility for the couple's survival in the world.³⁹

This definition sets forth an attitude designed to insure a greater sense of reward for both husband and wife. Where there is sensitivity to the

³⁷ Josef Goldbrunner defines Jung's concept of individuation as a "spiritual process by which the personality is built up." Individuation encourages the person toward a greater sense of worth and wholeness. Josef Goldbrunner, Individuation (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. 119.

³⁸ Abraham Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 91.

³⁹ Jean Stapleton and Richard Bright, Equal Marriage (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 13.

other's needs and aspirations, where there is support for assisting the other pursuant to the fulfillment of their needs and satisfactions, and where there is an honest and intentional attempt to negotiate and contract an equitable sharing of responsibilities, a 50-50 relationship can be approached, I believe.

Bianchi sees American social institutions mitigating against such a 50-50 sharing approach however. Society is so contaminated with machismo expectations that mutuality is difficult to achieve.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, many people are trying. Bianchi states: "We (he and his wife) have tried to divide the tasks of cooking, shopping, cleaning and the like from the beginning."⁴¹ He adds it hasn't been easy. But it has honored and respected the worth and enhancement of the other's right to carry only what is fair.

One respondent answered the questionnaire stating that she and her husband were attempting to share responsibilities more equally. Her going back to school made it impossible for her to do all the household chores and to look after the children as well. So her husband had to learn how to get to the dentist's office with the children, how to fix his breakfast, how to find food items on the supermarket shelf. It was a hardship at first, she reports, inasmuch as her husband had to learn entirely new roles. But he has adjusted, she reported, and as a result she now finds it possible to fulfill her aspirations with the support of her husband.

Egalitarian marriage is an attitude, a willingness to enter into, love and share life with another as a valued equal. Charlotte Clinebell

⁴⁰ Bianchi and Ruether, p. 120. ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 121.

has termed this "liberated marriage," defining it as a relationship where two people like each other, love each other, are able to have fun together, share in the "transcendent moments of life together," make serious commitments to help each other grow, respect each other's individuality, affirm each other, care for each other, enjoy sex with each other playfully and deeply, and are mutually committed to the goal of enjoying and "becoming human together."⁴²

2. Perspective on Identity. The question was asked on the questionnaire how the minister's spouse identified herself. How did she see herself; her identity, role and function in life. The responses given in order of frequency were: Mother, Wife, Friend, Woman, Person, Student, Member of a Congregation. Often several of these words were used in combination to describe multiple-identities and functions. They functioned as mothers and wives and friends and persons depending on the context of their various responsibilities and relationships.

The fact that most of them chose the term "Mother" to describe themselves may speak of the importance of that relationship to them. Some Liberationists today have flinched at the restricting and negative connotations of that term, blaming society's male-orientation for perpetuating its importance. Elizabeth Janeway states:

The Freudian mythos was invoked to justify a repeated affirmation of the enormous importance of woman's nature as mother. No social activity, women have been told, is more vital.⁴³

To be a mother is important. It is not a woman's only identity,

⁴²Clinebell, p. 50.

⁴³Elizabeth Janeway, Man's World, Woman's Place (New York: Morrow, 1971), p. 151.

but it is, in my opinion, a vital and essential giving of oneself to the growth and development of children. The minister's spouse, along with her husband, is an indispensable and nurturing facilitator of the family unit. "What children need," Janeway states, "is pretty much the same thing always: a map of the world, and instructions on how to use it."⁴⁴

I was disappointed that more of the respondents did not chose the term "Person" to describe their identity. Only three of them did so, and all three of them were in the younger age bracket. Several used the word "freedom" in indicating their growth journey toward greater self-worth and identity. One person said, "I am who I am," and another said, "I am me--with both strengths and weaknesses."

Later in this paper we will propose the term "Person" as a more desired, conscientious designation of women's more complete identity. The level at which the respondents answered the question of identity before us may say something of where they are. Though they affirm their growth and progress in self-esteem and worth, that self-esteem and worth are still principally identified with the mother-wife role. This is not to make a value judgment so much as it is to point out that there are other dimensions of the minister's spouse's life yet to be developed and discovered.

One respondent indicated she was struggling to find her identity. Many people, she complained, were forcing their expectations and assumptions upon her. She wanted to know more of who she was and could be. Yet another respondent simply conceded her identity to the church: "I do what the church expects of me," she said. Expectations from the church

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 150.

formed her identity and guided her decisions.

The identity question, in short, revealed strong patterns of responsibility and relationship related to family and husband. Only a few minister's spouses referred to themselves as persons, while at least one sublimated her identity totally to the church. My conclusion is that the maternal and marital relationships are the strongest identifying factors in the minister's spouse's assessment of her own identity, role and function as a woman.

3. Happiness Level. Happiness levels in marriage and vocational relationships are vital to one's well-being, morale and performance. Sociological studies done several years ago indicated that women tend to express and value happiness and well-being more greatly than men.⁴⁵ A later survey showed as well that in marriage "the association with overall happiness is considerably stronger for women than it is for men."⁴⁶ What this may be saying is that women place a higher premium on the emotional satisfaction level of a marriage relationship than do men, and that happiness is an essential pay-off for a continuing, on-going, healthy, giving and growing relationship. Where happiness levels are not met or experienced, morale and performance standards are effected.

Denton states that some corporations now consider their executives' wives as important as the executives themselves. One company, he says, estimated approximately 20 per cent of its otherwise acceptable trainee applicants for executive posts were rejected because of their

⁴⁵ Norman M. Bradburn, The Structure of Psychological Well-Being (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1965), p. 150.

⁴⁶ Susan R. Orden and Norman M. Bradburn, "Dimensions of Marriage Happiness," American Journal of Sociology, LXXIII (May 1968), p. 731.

wives.⁴⁷ Sensing that the wives would not be happy with their husbands working at a certain job or that there was unhappiness in the marriage relationship itself, the company rejected the husbands. Happiness and emotional fulfillment in the marriage relationship has a relationship to job creativity and performance.

Most of the respondents said they were extremely happy being minister's spouses. They stressed they chose the man to marry and not the profession. Several of the spouses expressed their desire to please and facilitate their husband's and family's happiness. There was a recognition of the influence and pay-off of happiness for the total family. "We have a fuller life for our family," said one person, "if Dad is having a rich experience."

The happiness level is a responsibility of both partners in the marriage. Both husband and wife are responsible for mutually nourishing and supporting their different needs. "In our marriage vows," Howard Clinebell writes, "we agree to become key resource persons to each other."⁴⁸ Husband and wife are to provide for each other the channels through which deep and satisfying "personality hungers" may be met.⁴⁹

4. Mutual Support. The questionnaire revealed that both ministers and their spouses are generally responsive in their mutual support of each other. Well over three-quarters of the spouses registered extreme support for their husbands in ministry. This

⁴⁷Denton, p. 35.

⁴⁸Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., and Charlotte H. Clinebell, The Intimate Marriage (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 19.

⁴⁹Ibid.

support took various shapes and forms from helping to carry out strong, intentional family growing experiences to assisting in the workings of the church itself. One person said she gave strong support to her husband for the first 15 years of his ministry, but for the last three years not as much. The children had grown up and she was finding a new identity in the pursuit of personal interests.

One person indicated having dropped away from the church while pursuing studies and feeling guilty in not giving her husband the support she felt he wanted and needed from her. Yet another person revealed marginal support for her husband, expressing frustration with the limitations of financial compensation and the lack of freedom to fulfill her life.

Support of the spouse is important. Without it, morale sinks and performance slackens. I know of a minister's spouse who declared to her husband one day that she did not care to be involved in the church any longer and would no longer support him in his task. That man is now out of the ministry. Support must be mutual.

There is a growing trend today among ministers as husbands who desire their wives to operate in the home and the church at levels of their own interest and initiative.⁵⁰ The relative and growing freedom wives are experiencing and enjoying in this respect was reflected in another question which asked spouses if their husbands supported them in their needs.

One person commented that her husband was extremely attentive and responsive to her needs:

⁵⁰Denton, p. 93.

He hears me when I'm hurt, disappointed, angry. He gives me room to work out my own problems in my own way. He tells me I'm a good mother and that I'm bright.

The complaint is sometimes heard that the minister is a pastor to everyone but his spouse. It is gratifying to hear such support and empathy just indicated of a minister-husband for his spouse.

Another person expressed her appreciation to make decisions apart from being monitored or put upon by her husband. "I'm free to make my own decisions," she said, "regarding my activities in or out of the home or church." Her husband, she concluded, was supportive of her decisions. Yet another person shared the feeling that if she did have needs that were not being fulfilled, she felt it reflected more on her own inability to cope than the responsibility of her husband to help.

We are reminded that love is the willingness not only to give, but receive.⁵¹ Mutual support is the hallmark of truly loving persons for whom the principle of reciprocity is a given. Those who support each other at their point of need enhance and grow as persons as well as enrich the relationship.

Two respondents indicated a reluctance on the part of their husbands to support their needs. One of them had gotten involved in going back to school and her husband was forced to assume some of the domestic duties around the house which he did not like to do. Another person reported her husband had misgivings and feelings of resistance about her activity in the feminist movement. But for the most part, the

⁵¹William Glasser has stated: "A person who does not learn as a little child to give and receive love may spend the rest of his life unsuccessfully trying to love." William Glasser, Reality Therapy (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 11.

respondents indicated sensitive, helpful, assisting and emotional support from their husbands.

When it came to attitudes of minister-husbands and their spouse's involvement in leadership positions in the church, support sharply diminished. Two of the spouses said they were currently serving as elders on the session of their church, and another, a deacon. But nearly half of the responses said that either they did not wish to serve in positions of leadership in the church or their husbands did not want them to serve. Most of the responses were in the latter category.

Several spouses expressed the desire to serve on the session, but either their husband or the church did not approve. "I would like to become an elder someday," said one, "but Harold feels he can function better if I am not on that governing body." Another spouse said, "...my husband feels it is somewhat a conflict of interest. I disagree, feeling I am able to be as objective as the next member." And yet another indicated that if she were elected to the session it would upset the church terribly.

It is unfortunate there are churches and ministers who are closed to the potential available for church leadership in women, and specifically the minister's spouse. It points up what Bianchi refers to when he calls the church a "male-regulated"⁵² institution. If anything, the church should be leading the way for women's rights by being an example in its practices and use of talent within its membership. By doing so, the church could become the "sensitive conscience"⁵³ of society, moving others toward justice and equality.

⁵² Bianchi and Ruether, p. 127. ⁵³ Ibid.

The minister-husband needs to be liberated from traditional male dominate images in himself and the church as well. If his spouse has talents for leadership and desires to serve and discharge those talents creatively and effectively, he should encourage her involvement. Again, mutual support calls for reciprocity of genuine need-fulfillment.

5. Parenting. Parenting responsibilities, for the most part, fall on the mother in this country. Kenneth Keniston has said that our American society has chosen to underline women's biological necessity to bear and raise children by "minimizing men's responsibility for both emotional life and child-training."⁵⁴ The reality of our way of life renders other alternatives difficult. The husband works and is away from the home. The burden of child-raising as a consequence falls upon the spouse.

Some minister's spouses, the questionnaire revealed, feel very deeply about the lack of time their husbands are able, or choose, to spend with their children. Reflecting on this problem in the past, one respondent stated:

The duties of the ministry took George away from the home for most of the time for many years. I resent it. George went to church meetings and duties while I attended P.T.A.. I was the one who saw the teachers for reports. I was the one who attended school programs and open houses---and graduation exercises---alone more often than not!

The pattern is clear. Mothers, and minister's spouses in particular, bear an inordinate burden in the parenting responsibility role.

Six out of the twenty-four respondents said they felt they shared parenting responsibilities on a relatively equal basis. But the

⁵⁴ Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted (New York: Dell, 1965), p. 282.

rest of the spouses said that parenting responsibilities fell heavily upon their own shoulders.

Statistically, five spouses estimated their responsibility percentage as 80 per cent on their shoulders and 20 per cent on their husband's. Five others figured their responsibility percentage at 60 per cent to 40 per cent. All percentages averaged out at a 70 to 30 per cent parenting load on the spouse's shoulders. While in seminary, added one person, the percentage ratio was 90 to 10 on her side.

The importance of sharing parenting responsibilities cannot be overstated. Old traditions of letting mother raise the children while father stands by and enters the scene only in an emergency must be challenged.⁵⁵ Children need the emotional support, presence and involvement of both masculine and feminine images. "The real winners in equal parenting," Stapleton says, "are the parents, especially the father."⁵⁶ Equalization in parenting responsibilities is important and necessary.

Minister-fathers are busy people. But children need both parents to love and from whom to learn responsibility and trust. A father's time, spent creatively and intentionally, with his children, I believe, will not only relieve the burden of child-raising from his spouse's shoulders, but enhance his own credibility and identity as a father, a husband, and

⁵⁵Keniston typifies the traditional father, saying: "He is expected to support his wife in her major activities as home manager and child-bearer, but not to interfere. He should appreciate her efforts, back up her discipline, cherish her as a person, and let her know he likes her cooking--but not tell her how to run the house. His wife is the executive manager of the home, and he is the chairman of the board--who occasionally discusses overall child-rearing policy with his wife and is the ultimate recourse when her discipline fails: in an emergency, he may administer a spanking." Ibid., p. 283.

⁵⁶Stapleton, p. 77.

a leader in the church.

There are many creative models for sharing parenting responsibilities. The important thing is to choose and contract a specific time and place for creative contact to occur. One spouse reported that the essential strength of her own marriage was due to the fact that her husband faithfully took his day off for the family to be together and do things together.

6. Work Outside the Home. An increasing number of women across the country in recent years have gone to work. We commented earlier how after World War I and II, women were invited to enter the work force in order to fill the needs of a growing industrialized society. Valerie Oppenheimer points out the acceleration of women's entrance into the work force, stating:

...in 1970, 50% of American women, 18-64, were in the labor force compared with 30% in 1940 and 20% in 1900.⁵⁷

The increasing availability of jobs, plus the reality of inflation and the diminishing buying power of the dollar, has encouraged and forced many women to work outside the home. The more women who enter the labor market, the more who are encouraged to do so.⁵⁸

Of the twenty-four respondents answering the questionnaire, only seven said they did not work outside the home. Two of the seven were retired; two were going to school and another indicated she was planning on getting back to work by the end of the year.

⁵⁷ Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, "Demographic Influence on Female Employment and the Status of Women," in Joan Huber (Ed.) Changing Women in a Changing Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) p. 185.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 197.

For the rest of the respondents, work was a part of their daily activity. Four of them worked full time, two worked three-quarters time, and the remainder half-time or several hours a week. The major reason for working was the need for more money to supplement the family income. The economic strain and pressure was particularly felt when the children grew up and went away to school. It was then that more money was needed.

At least four mentioned work as an emotional release for them.

Said one:

I like to work. It is a creative outlet for me. I feel that I need space away from 'parenting' to bring more of myself to our daughter.⁵⁹

Another spouse indicated she had taken up art work and set up shop in her garage, employing her minister-husband to help her make frames and contract sales.

The kinds of jobs held by the respondents were as follows:

Occupational Therapist, Teacher in College, working in a Grocery Store, working in a University Office, working at a Senior Center, an Elementary School Teacher, as a Christian Education Director, a Secretary-Bookkeeper for a Veterinarian, a Secretary in an Elementary School, a Secretary in a Counseling Office, a Career Planning Consultant, and an Instructional Aide in an Elementary School.⁶⁰

Traditional assumptions once frowned if a minister's spouse worked outside the home. Many minister's spouses today however are doing

⁵⁹ Stapleton, p. 82, states: "An infant is not very stimulating company for months at a time. Both parents need to get out among adults frequently to keep their sanity and to keep growing themselves."

⁶⁰ According to Lucille Lavender, They Cry Too! (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976), p. 75, "...45 per cent of clergymen's wives work," today.

so for economic reasons as well as emotional ones. Today's spouse is involved in work as a means of supporting her family and its future well-being. As an income-producer, work has served as well to enhance her self-esteem and allow her to meet others in a world beyond the home. Work has permitted the spouse a degree of financial independence, giving her freedom to manage her resources and further enhance her sense of worth as a person with capabilities and decision-making power.⁶¹

7. Involvement in the Community. The minister's spouse, as a wife and public figure, may or may not be expected to be involved in community concerns and organizations. In some communities, her support is expected. She may be asked to lend her name to various charitable or self-interest organizations. Unlike Denton's research which found minister's spouses relatively uninvolved,⁶² the results of my questionnaire found them to be quite involved in the community.

Three-quarters of the respondents said they were either active or partially active in the community. They shared a wide range of participation in service groups, civic groups, ecumenical groups, personal interest groups, recreational groups and groups involving their children. Several persons who were not involved in community activities expressed their desire to get out and become involved, indicating such an experience would be good for them.

At least six persons said they were not involved in the community, giving such reasons as: "Not enough time," "Church work and school take up my outside-the-family time thoroughly." One person in her fifties

⁶¹Bianchi and Ruether, p. 122. ⁶²Denton, p. 126.

stated: "I'd like to avoid volunteer work for the rest of my life... unless I do the volunteering." This person indicated she had had difficulty in saying "no" in the past to the expectations laid upon her.

The reasons given for the spouse's involvement in community activities centered basically around the need to make contact with people outside the church, to encounter others at their point of need, to feel useful and needed, and to find, as one person put it, "identity." One person said that involvement in the community allowed her to "enjoy friendship, new experiences, innocent merriment and comic relief."

For those who said they enjoyed being involved outside the home and church in community activities, they indicated it served to stimulate their energies and make them better persons. Their relationships were improved all around. And they were able to meet their husbands on a more creative and equal footing. Their expanding involvement expanded in turn their own consciousness and excitement for life. They found themselves experiencing feelings of greater worth and value for their contributions.

8. Fulfilled and Non-fulfilled Aspects of Ministry. Minister's spouses are like anyone else in respect to their need to find fulfillment in the context of their relationships. The questionnaire asked the spouses to respond to the question asking their involvement in the church and the results of that involvement in terms of fulfilled and non-fulfilled feelings.

Virtually every respondent indicated they were involved in the church in a variety of ways. They found this involvement a fulfilling experience. Those from smaller more rural churches indicated a higher

degree of involvement in the church serving alongside their husbands where needed, expressing a high degree of satisfaction in their participation. Those in larger urban churches were not as actively involved in the church or over such wide areas of service.

One of Maslow's heirarcy of needs is what he calls the need to belong and to be loved. A person hungers for "affectionate relations with people in general...for a place in his group."⁶³ Several spouses mentioned the importance of the church as a caring and facilitating family. They indicated how good it was to receive support and love from members of the congregation, especially in times of crisis. The church lent them strength, prayers, and help. One person replied that the best aspect of the ministry was being accepted as congenial and friendly even before the congregation knew them. "No matter where we moved, there was a church full of ready-made friends waiting to help us get settled." Still others found rewards in their husband's preaching and teaching. Only one person refused to think of herself as somehow being "in" the ministry. "I am not in the ministry," she said. Though this person claimed support for her husband, the ministry was something he did, she said.

Responding to the non-fulfilling aspects of the ministry, the respondents listed such complaints as having to play a role, getting phone calls at dinner time, criticism by the congregation of their husbands, long and needless committee meetings, not having Sundays or weekends off, not enough time with the family, financial limitations

⁶³ Maslow, p. 89.

and not owning their own home.⁶⁴

Further frustrations expressed by the respondents indicated annoyance with the stereotypic projections people placed upon them. Some indicated how people outside the church treated them as someone who was "different" and around whom they felt the necessity to cool the off-color jokes and put on masks of piety. Even within the church, other spouses said, people treated them as someone special. They found themselves excluded from parties members of the congregation were having with one another and expressed the pain of not having close friends.⁶⁵ They wished that other people, as well as members of the congregation, would simply treat them like ordinary people. The minister's spouses feel the need to belong, but also to be treated as ordinary members of the congregation; nothing more, nothing less.

9. Expectations. Seven of the respondents said they felt their church placed no performance expectations on them. Two of these persons were wives of assistant and associate pastors. Expectations on wives of senior pastor-husbands is always generally greater. Those stating they felt no expectations upon them were principally from larger churches. Six of the seven, in fact, were from churches whose membership was in excess of 550 members. Larger churches offer more anonymity to the minister's spouse while in the small church the spouse is more vulnerable and exposed.

Regional considerations were reported in my research as having

⁶⁴ See additional list of complaints in Lavender, p. 92.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 94-95.

some relationship to role expectations placed on them by churches. One person stated:

In the East there was much more role playing expected. In the West there is more acceptance of you as you are.

Another person reported the direct opposite of the above statement. She said:

In New Jersey I was treated like a queen by the congregation. In Michigan, too, I was received in the kindest and most respectful way. In Northern California I was treated as a convenience. In Southern California the church proved to be friendlier and less demanding where I was concerned. Still, there were some people who considered me an employee.

The evidence presented in the above responses tells us there are both fulfilling and non-fulfilling aspects of the ministry, and there are fewer expectations today than at one time. The minister's spouse has a need to belong and be loved just as any other member of the congregation. She still experiences old stereotypic role projections and suffers the pain of being treated special or different. What she wants is to be treated like anyone else, as a Christian, and as a person.

D. The Quest for a New Identity

1. Summary of Questionnaire. The responses from the questionnaire tell us that minister's spouses are still wrestling with old expectations laid upon them from the past. Many of these expectations are inaccurate, unreasonable and unfair, the result of stereotypic generalization about women generally and minister's spouses specifically.

This questionnaire has indicated that minister's spouses have, in fact, begun to change, to find new ways to fulfill their needs and aspirations. The Women's Liberation Movement has played a part in this direction. Minister's spouses have been encouraged and facilitated by

the Women's Movement in their search and growth toward self-worth, esteem and potential.

Today's minister's spouse is involved outside the home in work and in the community. She is still overloaded with an unequal share of the parenting responsibility but is moving toward a more egalitarian type of relationship. She is basically happy in her marriage, cherishes her role as mother and wife, but needs more support from her husband in family affairs. She is involved in the church as a strong supporter of her husband's work, but suffers from old stereotypic projections from those both outside as well as inside the church. She has capabilities and talents, but many times her husband or the church will not recognize or approve her involvement in significant leadership roles in the church.

In short, the minister's spouse is in a process of change, of growth, of becoming. Her consciousness has been raised as to her worth, identity and potential as a woman. She is experiencing new and exciting dimensions of life and freedom. If she wants more freedom, more fulfillment, she is going to have to look at what she wants and begin to achieve it herself.⁶⁶ But others can help. They can help by giving encouragement. They can help by helping her to find a new identity, an identity descriptive and commensurate with her emerging sense of worth, value, esteem and potential.

2. A New Identity. The minister's spouse I believe is on the verge of a new identity. The question is, how can we give theological substance to such an identity? How can we speak theologically of the

⁶⁶William Douglas, Minister's Wives (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 183.

minister's spouse as person, as one whose identity transcends old stereotypes and traditionalistic sexist categories? How can we identify her as truly feminine yet beyond feminine, as equal with man yet in creative relationship and tension with man?

Let us attempt to define her identity at the starting point of her own beginnings as woman, created in the image of God. And let us look at God as possessing and expressing the very nature from whence her identity has come and is to be understood, honored, respected, esteemed and facilitated.

Chapter III

THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR A NEW IDENTITY

A. An Androgynous Nature

1. Imago Dei. Traditional theology has affirmed that man has been created in the image of God. Man somehow resembles God, is like God. But how? What is the distinctive nature and content of imago Dei? Is woman part of that nature and content?

Traditional views and definitions of imago Dei in Christian theology have been varied and controversial over the years.¹ For the first thousand years of church history, theologians generally adhered to a classical Greek conception of man, stating that rationality was the distinctive meaning of imago Dei.² Later, other theologians attempted to interpret imago Dei as meaning man's dominion over the earth, to "fill the earth and subdue it."³

The difficulty with the first view of imago Dei is that it equates man's resemblance to God as meaning reason. It assumes that man possesses a special endowment by right of being. This view too easily

¹For a full critical approach to the history and doctrine of imago Dei, see Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939); and David Cairns, The Image of God in Man (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953).

²Stuart Babbage, Man in Nature and In Grace (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1957), p. 14

³Genesis 1:28. Also, see G. C. Berkouwer, Man: The Image of God (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1962), pp. 70-72.

lends itself to arrogance not to speak of its erroneous assumptions based on a Greek concept of man.⁴ Besides, it communicates strong masculine stereotypic images. The "dominion" view as well suggests masculine images and fails to communicate the nature and content of imago Dei.

Karl Barth has departed from these traditional theological renderings of imago Dei to define its meaning, nature and content as existing in the creation of man as male and female:⁵

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.⁶

Barth argues that the "male and female" clause in the verse just mentioned is interpretive of the former clause, "God created man." The essential meaning of imago Dei is to be understood, Barth concludes, as man being male and female.⁷

If Barth is correct, if man's meaning and uniqueness is to be understood that he has been created as male and female, then Barth has presented us with a view of masculine and feminine value. He has raised the possibility of viewing and understanding male and female as equals from the start, as corporately sharing the image of God. Further implications are suggested in the relationship between male and female. If they are equals, possessors of imago Dei,⁸ their relationship must

⁴Babbage, p. 15.

⁵Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), III/1, pp. 184-196.

⁶Genesis 1:28. ⁷Barth, III/1, p. 184.

⁸Thielicke states: "In the first account of creation there is no indication whatsoever of any distinction of rank between man and woman... Both, a man and woman, are equally immediate to the Creator and his act;"

somehow be defined as complimentary. They are involved with each other in a loving,⁹ communicating relationship, a relationship that expresses the nature of each, as masculine and feminine. Since God created each in his own image, does not that suggest that there is a corresponding resemblance in God's own nature. That is, that God expresses himself in both masculine and feminine ways; that God is in fact androgynous.

2. Expressions of Masculine and Feminine. To get at this, let us look at God's expressions to his people in historical and redemptive perspective. Do not the rubrics of judgment and grace, punishment and forgiveness, strength and tenderness, further lend themselves to interpreting God's nature as masculine and feminine? Let us look at God's communication to his people to see if this might be a possibility.

God enters into a covenant with Adam and Eve. He instructs them to eat freely of every tree in the garden but to abstain from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The expression of God at this point would appear masculine. The disobedience of Adam and Eve likewise illicit a masculine response from God: judgment. There is a verdict and a sentence.

But God then takes the initiative to enable the fallen pair to somehow find themselves, to assist them in their plight. He makes them garments of skins, clothing them to cover their sensitized condition, nakedness.¹⁰ This response is similar to a more feminine approach, the

Helmut Thielicke, The Ethics of Sex (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 6.

⁹Williams interprets the meaning of imago Dei as the dynamics of love. Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 133.

¹⁰Genesis 3:21.

desire to intercede, nurture, protect and care for another's condition.

A brief exegesis of Hosea 11:1-9 dramatizes the traditional theological categories of judgment and grace once again, the meeting of masculine and feminine responses. In the genre of a trial setting where God stands up to accuse his covenant people of their sin, he rehearses his commitment and love for them, saying:

...it was I who taught Ephriam to walk, I took them up in my arms...I led them with cords of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws and I bent down to them and fed them.¹¹

After rehearsing the investment of His love for his people in these paternal and tender (feminine) expressions, God turns to assume the position of Judge and to quickly and decisively render a verdict and sentence:

They shall return to the land of Egypt...The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them in their fortresses.¹²

This latter explosion of judgment resembles a strong masculine response. But God returns immediately once more to His tender (feminine) side, saying:

How can I give you up, O Ephriam! How can I hand you over, O Israel!¹³

God gets in touch with His feminine side, and grace prevails. The masculine and feminine sides of God meet: judgment and grace. And grace overcomes.

Expressions of the masculine and feminine are witnessed in Jesus as well. Owning the integrity of His own identity as Son of Man, Jesus brushes up against the bristles of traditional religious authority

¹¹Hosea 11:3,4. ¹²Hosea 11:8. ¹³Hosea 11:8d.

(masculine vs. masculine) and political authority. Jesus confronts the religious leaders, protesting their diminishment of the searching masses, their injustice, their hypocrisy. Jesus challenges the vendors of merchandise in the Temple, the money-changers. And he rebukes Peter face to face for wishing to divert Jesus from his appointment with destiny. All of these expressions indicate strong masculine responses.

But Jesus expressed a feminine side as well. He expressed compassion, tenderness, tears. On the night Jesus looked out over the city of Jerusalem from the brow of Olivet, he symbolically reached out to embrace his people in a moment of anguish: "How often would I have gathered your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings," (feminine response) "and you would not!"¹⁴ The agony of rejection is deeply felt by the feminine side.

On other occasions, Jesus would be seen reaching out in loving attention toward women, women who were generally despised and diminished in esteem by both religious tradition and culture. Jesus reached out and nurtured the needs of those women, giving them hope, and restoring imago Dei, the gift of identity.¹⁵

Jesus, I believe, exemplified an androgynous balance of judgment and grace, of masculine and feminine responses held in tension by love. He met people where they were and touched their longings to come alive, to be loved and to have an identity. He raised people to new levels of self-esteem and worth,¹⁶ affirming them as persons, citizens of the Kingdom of God and participants in God's blessings and mission.

Likewise, Jesus challenged the masculinized authority structures

¹⁴Matthew 23:37.

¹⁵Thielicke, pp. 8-10.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 9.

of religious tradition and institutionalism. He rendered harsh words for those who perpetuated "the traditions of men." He had little patience with those who hid behind false fronts of piety, while insensitively ignoring the needs of the weak and the poor. And as a result of his confrontive and challenging style, he met his death on the cross-bars of Roman power and Jewish traditionalism. The excessive and out-of-control power of masculine values crucified him.

The masculinity and femininity of God and Jesus Christ has been dealt with here to move us away from the stereotype of God being masculine alone. Our traditional assumptions in theology in the past, and our language have too often been formulated around masculine imagery to the exclusion of God's feminine counterpart.¹⁷ Imago Dei has been interpreted traditionally as masculine, as well. The effect has been that of diminishing woman to a secondary position whose entire meaning is to support her male counterpart come what may. Theology needs to get back to the original order of creation, and to understand God as more than masculine. Some women in the Women's Movement have raised our consciousness to this fact and urge a more androgynous understanding of God and each other, both male and female.¹⁸

The effect of understanding God as androgynous, I believe, is to elevate women to the level of equality with men. Androgyne should be an affirmation of woman's worth. It should help to form and create for her a new identity. An identity that affirms that she is not inferior or

¹⁷ John B. Cobb, Jr., Christ in a Pluralistic Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 263.

¹⁸ See Pat Doyle, "Women and Religion," in Rosemary Ruether, Religion and Sexism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 39.

lesser than man. She is not secondary or subservient to her male counterpart.¹⁹ She is equal by virtue of her having been created in the image of God.

Woman is a partner with man in the adventure and responsibilities of life. Because she is an equal partner, she can affirm her femininity as gift...her compassion, tenderness, nurture, love...as reflections of God's own feminine side. She can own her femininity as strength and wisdom. She can be a total woman whose relationship to man now becomes truly complimentary and completional. This is her identity. She is the reflection of God's own androgynous nature and image.

In an effort to state something of this truth, the Presbyterian Church of the United States proposed the following statement:

God made human beings male and female for their mutual help and comfort and joy. We hold that the difference between the sexes is real and good and God-given. It enriches the whole range of human relationships. It must not serve as a pretext for apathy or deceit, for contempt or cruelty, for denying anyone's rights or rewards or opportunities to develop potential to the full.²⁰

This affirmation serves to emphasize a positive identity theologically. It also serves to protect women from traditional stereotypic images that would reduce their value and worth. Women, and the minister's spouse in particular, are unique expressions of God's own image and nature. Their contribution to men is indispensable. Their relationship to man completional.

But there is another identity that transcends sexual distinction,

¹⁹Thielicke, p. 8.

²⁰Proposed statement by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. in its Declaration of Faith (Book of Confessions, Ch. 2, Sec. 5:69-78) in United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Minutes of General Assembly Journal part 1A (1974), p. 103.

as important as that is. There is an identity that calls women and the minister's spouse to be above all a "person."

B. A New Humanity

1. Beyond Feminism. Women have an identity beyond their traditional roles and responsibilities as mothers and spouses. They are persons in their own right who have interests, concerns, abilities, talents, creativity and a host of other facilitating values to share in the enrichment of her own life, that of her husband's, family, church, community and world. This new identity has its parallel in St. Paul's theology.

2. In Christ. The ideal for women and men is a new humanity where both share equally in the joys, sorrows and gifts of God's grace and love. Clues to such a new humanity may be drawn from St. Paul's Christology. Though Paul may not have been totally liberated from the old influences of Rabbinical and cultural stereotypes about women, his Christology nonetheless serves us at this point as a powerful motif for assuming a view of humanity where distinctive, divisional and antagonizing sexist categories are overcome in a transcendence of new purpose and loyalty to Christ. "In Christ," Paul tells the Galatian Christians, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female, but all are one in Christ."²¹ In Christ, Paul suggests, all normally traditional stereotypic, alienating sexual, social, cultural, economic, psychological, racially antagonistic extremes are overcome. In Christ women find a new value, a new orientation, a new

²¹Galatians 3:28.

spirit, a new love, a new appreciation for others and their "differentness," a new community and a desire to be totally herself in response to God and the needs of others. She is a person. She is a person because she understands and has responded to God who is highly personal.²² God has shared part of his own identity with her, giving her his own nature, value and meaning. God, through Christ, has bestowed his own image upon her, restoring the creation order intention of imago Dei. She now becomes woman and more. She is "person."

²²Charles A. Curran, Religious Values in Counseling and Psychotherapy (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), p. 186.

Chapter IV

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THIS NEW IDENTITY

A. Worth and Value

God's affirmation of woman as person may be translated into the psychological rubrics of worth and value. Worth and value, I believe, become the new identity for woman as person. She is no longer object, but subject. She is no longer a symbol for the enhancement of male ego-aggrandizement. She is no longer stuck and hopelessly trapped between "libido-thralldom on the one hand and despotism on the other..."¹ She is no longer the projection of fantasies or stereotypic generalizations. She is no longer held by past expectations. She is no longer an "it." She is person. She is a person who is a precious equal to man, an indispensable other half, a complimentary and completional gift of God to man's own incompleteness. And as a precious equal, her worth and value is important and enhancing to my own discovery of value, my own journey toward wholeness.

B. Process

The process of discovering wholeness, of discovering worth and value, is through encounter, through dialogue. Dialogue reveals the

¹ Helmut Thielicke, The Ethics of Sex (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 8.

the other's essential meaning and being, and as a result I learn something of my own essential meaning as a person.² Through dialogue I am enabled not only to know the personality of the others, but something more of the person herself, the one who lives inside as mysterious, private, precious, longing, worthwhile, desirous and valued.³

Dialogue enables me not only to approach the essential meaning of the other person as worthwhile and valued, it further enables me to respond, to speak, to validate that worth and value. It gives me the opportunity to respect the other's right to individuality and self-determination as a free⁴ and responsible person. As I experience the response of the other, I am enabled to get in touch and affirm my own self-worth and value as a person and reciprocate love. Together in dialogue, we establish a convalidating dynamic that produces mutuality, the best in each of our potentials.

Bianchi shares something of this experience in his own life, indicating it as a process where he has learned to embrace "my own particularity as this man freed from past stereotypes," and accepting woman "not only as a fellow human but as a distinct and different

²Tournier states that dialogue obliges us to take up a position in regard to the other, to commit ourselves. "At the moment of true dialogue, of inner personal communion---the person is revealed. That is why Sartre writes: 'I cannot know myself except through the intermediary of another person.'" Paul Tournier, The Meaning of Persons (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 130.

³Paul Johnson, Person and Counselor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 27.

⁴"To be free is to become oneself once more, not the biological self of reflexes, of inexorable mechanisms that impede the flow of life, but the self of the person. These moments of liberation are the ones that are truly fruitful." Tournier, pp. 218-219.

individual,"⁵ and appreciating her contribution to him. The process means relinquishment of self-sufficiency, of sexist stereotypes, of facing the other, of becoming vulnerable, of risking correction, of learning to appreciate and grow with the other's experiences as if it were my own. This then becomes mutuality.

C. Self-Actualization

To be a person is to be mature.⁶ It is to become a self-actualizing person who experiences autonomy and self-worth and is able to affirm self-worth in others. To get there, Maslow has called people to focus on positive "growth motivation" instead of "deficiency motivation."⁷ Growth motivation Maslow describes as loving other persons for their "being," their "true self," their "person." Deficiency motivation, on the other hand, loves selfishly, for what another can contribute. Growth motivation focuses on love that is similar to Biblical "agape" and our theological understanding of grace, unconditional acceptance. This kind of love and grace, Maslow says,

...creates the partner, it gives him self-image, it gives him self-acceptance, a feeling of love-worthiness, all of which permit him to grow. It is the real question whether the full development of the human being is possible without it.⁸

It is the full development of the individual that we are interested in when referring to the minister's spouse. It is her development as a person that we wish to encourage. The words of Ruth Truman

⁵Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Ruether, From Machismo to Mutuality (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 131.

⁶Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being (New York: Van Nostrand, Reinhold, 1968), p. 202.

⁷Ibid., pp. 21-44. ⁸Ibid., pp. 43-44.

earlier in this paper are heard once again:

I learned a lot about me, about other people, about life and death, joy and sorrow. And I discovered that my friends who were minister's wives were also in trouble because no one had prepared them to live as full persons regardless of their husband's job.⁹

The minister's spouse has been called to live as a full person. Becoming a self-actualizing individual, a person in dialogue with all of life, constantly learning, growing, maturing, will lead her to experience new freedoms. She has been, after all, created in the very image of God. She has worth and value. And she has something indispensable to contribute to her male counterpart: her identity. As she comes to own her identity as person, as a self-actualizing individual, her value and worth will begin to touch and enhance all those around her...her husband, her family, church, community and world.

⁹Ruth Truman, Underground Manual for Minister's Wives (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), pp. 7-8.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the minister's spouse in this paper as one who is on the verge of a new identity. She is the product of a long tradition, a tradition that bears the marks of expectations. She has lived through these expectations and is emerging beyond them. She is learning to find what is helpful and encouraging to her own quest for worth and value as a person.

The questionnaire documented the journey of a number of minister's spouses who are growing and finding new purpose and direction in their lives apart from living their identities through their husband and the church. The minister's spouse is in a process of continuing conscious raising. She is learning that there are better ways to discover her worth than what she has known in the past.

There is a theological understanding of God that can help her on her journey. It is to understand God as androgynous, as possessing both masculine and feminine expressions. Created in the image of God, she is the feminine reflection of God. She is equal with her male counterpart in the adventure and responsibilities of creation.

She is a mother, a spouse, a friend, and many other appellations describing her many functions. But ultimately she is person. She is man's equal and partner in life, whose gift is to complete man's incompleteness. She is indispensable. She is worthful. She is valuable.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please indicate the general age bracket into which you personally fall:
 - a. 20-29 _____
 - b. 30-39 _____
 - c. 40-49 _____
 - d. 50-59 _____
 - e. 60-69 _____
2. Did you grow up in the church? If so, did that exposure influence you to marry a minister? If not, what influenced you to marry your spouse?
3. Were you married to your spouse before, during or after his/her theological training?
4. What were some specific expectations you had of the ministry at the outset?
5. Have those expectations come true? If so, how? If not, how not?
6. How long has your spouse been in the ministry?
7. What is the approximate membership of your present church? _____
8. Are there others on the staff, and what size a community is your church located?
9. Are you happy being the spouse of a "minister"?
10. Would you define your support of your spouse and what he/she does as extremely supportive, somewhat supportive, tolerable, uninvolved?
11. What expectations, if any, have you felt the church has placed upon you?

12. How would you describe who you are at the present time and how you feel you are to function?
13. Is your spouse supportive and encouraging of you and your own personal needs for fulfillment? How?
14. Are there areas of leadership in the church where either the church or your spouse would prefer you stay away from? What are they?
15. What aspects of the ministry are most fulfilling and pleasing to you?
16. What aspects of the ministry displease or annoy you the most?
17. How many children do you have, their ages, and how many living at home?
18. Do you and your spouse divide parenting responsibilities equally? If not, what percentage of time and effort falls to each?
19. Do you work either part-time or full-time outside the home? If so, what prompted you to choose to work and what is the nature of the work?
20. If you do not work outside the home, what factors influenced you not to work?
21. Are you involved in social or community activities outside the church? If so, what are they and how do they reward you?
22. Has the women's liberation movement in this country influenced you in any way in regard to how you presently regard your worth and function as a minister's spouse?

23. What other influences have helped to identify who you are and where you are at this time?
24. Are you or have you met with a group of minister's spouses, and how have you found that experience?
25. What might the church do to help you to find personal worth, fulfillment and facilitative meaning?

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